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SUCCESS STORY

A Woman's Commitment Pays Off

The Jebrayel Saffron Producing Union empowers women in Hirat Province



[ASGP/Herat Staff]

Women from the Saffron Makers Association of Jebrayel prepare pickles for processing.

With support from USAID, the Ambassador's Small Grants Program is strengthening the capacity of women-focused civil society organizations to contribute to the social, economic, and political development of women throughout Afghanistan.

Located in Afghanistan's Hirat Province, Jebrayel District is home to many Afghan families living in desperate economic conditions. Women lack marketable skills, few are literate, and many families have no one to earn income at all. Children beg on the streets to survive. Little affordable food is available locally. The situation is dire, but with a practical idea, a commitment to change, and support from the Ambassador's Small Grants Program (ASGP), women in Jebrayel are gaining skills in entrepreneurship and changing their community.

Several years ago, Ms. Kubra, an active leader in her community, founded the Jebrayel Saffron Producing Union to teach women how to process saffron and gain income for their families. Saffron processing has become an extremely competitive, lucrative business and Ms. Kubra wanted to expand her operations. She approached the ASGP regional office in Hirat seeking a quick-impact grant to enable her association to expand and develop a new source of income—pickle processing. ASGP staff helped her to prepare a grant application for funding to set up a greenhouse and teach members of the association how to grow and process pickles.

Ms. Kubra's grant was approved for USAID funding in March 2010, and she is now teaching 60 women marketable skills to help generate income. With the added funds, her association is expanding. In one room, women of all ages sit around a large table chopping vegetables or stirring pickles in huge pots on gas stoves. In another room, the pickles are ladled into jars, spiced, sealed, and labeled for sale in the community. A group of association members has set up booths at local markets throughout Jebrayel to sell the pickles.

After paying the cost for the greenhouse and pickle processing, the women share the extra proceeds to provide for their families, improving their status in the home, and building their self-esteem and self-reliance. The association hopes to extend its activities further to reach more women. "We will move to a new place when our renovation is complete. If we can manage to move this far, we can move a long way," says Mrs. Kubra.